

## 2.2.07 - We Are Indebted To Our First Responders

As January comes to an end, hearts are again heavy across the Mountain State. Twice in a little more than two weeks, southern West Virginia has experienced unimaginable tragedy, first on the night of January 13, when nine people perished in a blaze of such magnitude that engulfed the 61-unit Emmons Jr. Apartment Building in Huntington, and again on the morning of January 30, when four individuals were killed in a gas station explosion in Ghent so horrific, so unbelievable, that it attracted the attention of the Nation.

My prayers go out to those who were injured or lost loved ones in these accidents, my heart goes out to all of those affected, and I offer my assistance in any way possible as we begin the long road to recovery. It is times like these that truly test the strength and soul of our communities. But it is also in times like these that we are reminded of the network of support that sets West Virginia apart. It is in times like these that we are reminded that we are a family.

We are also reminded, in times like these, of selflessness and sacrifice of those who have enlisted to protect our family - our brave first responders. Two of these heroes, Craig Lawrence Dorsey and Frederick Allen Burroughs, lost their lives in the explosion in Ghent. Another volunteer firefighter, Donnie Caldwell, remains hospitalized. Like the first responders who rushed to the scene of the Emmons Fire, these firefighters were doing what they do every day - responding to the call of duty. They lost their lives protecting the lives of others.

It is difficult for me to put into words the enormous pride that we all feel in the humble heroism displayed by the men who lost their lives in Ghent, of the men and women who saved countless lives during the Emmons fire and of all of our first responders. The first to arrive, often the last to leave, they represent the best of humanity - the best of us.

Dave Mullins, a 19-year firefighting veteran and friend of the fallen Ghent emergency service workers perhaps said it best when he said, "Volunteers don't do it for the glory. They do it for the community. They do it because they want to, not because they have to."

We can never repay those brave men for their sacrifice, nor can we ever repay our first responders for the work they do, but one thing we can do is make sure they have the tools to do their jobs as safely and efficiently as possible.

It is with this in mind that I have urged Operation Respond, a nonprofit serving the emergency response community with time and lifesaving technology tools to combat safety and security incidents occurring on North American railroads and highways, to send its software to first responders in southern West Virginia free of charge.

Working with the Rahall Transportation Institute, Operation Respond is doing cutting-edge work that is important to protecting not only our citizens, but our first responders.

In addition to my work with Operation Respond, I recently established helped establish a GPS Technology Deployment Program at the RTI which will arm our brave first-responders with the equipment and training they need to keep our families safe. I secured \$493,614 for this program as part of the Department of Justice appropriations bill last year.

In addition, I remain dedicated to securing grants for emergency responders throughout southern West Virginia. I have fought for increased funding time and time again and while we have made many successes, we have more work to do.

These brave men and women protect our citizens every day and they deserve the best and most reliable equipment for their dedicated service.

Christ instructed us, it is even "lawful to do well on the Sabbath days." First responders do well 24 hours, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year. Whenever, wherever needed.

We are truly blessed to have such angels of mercy among us.

U.S. Rep. Nick Rahall (D-WV) represents West Virginia's 3rd District